

REBELLION FOR SALE

by Joseph

Matheny

Gil came to sitting at a dirty, crumb-infested table in a doughnut shop somewhere in the southern California desert. He shook his head in a vain attempt to clear the cobwebs.

Somewhere in his mind, drifting up from a black, bottomless void, a metallic voice calmly said: “The warm, woolly, cotton brain of infancy.”

“Wha...?” he said out loud.

”What?” the woman working the counter snapped.

“Nothing” Gil mumbled back. He glanced suspiciously at a soda machine that sat buzzing in the corner.

“Now — to figure out where I am and how I got here.” he thought to himself.

He looked around the doughnut shop, at the dingy sparse atmosphere.

Fluorescent lights hummed overhead in a 60-cycle symphony, like something composed by Stockhausen after the helicopters had run out of fuel. The shop, although locally owned, looked like it could presently be, or have once been, a franchise establishment. It had that Spartan, stamped-out look, like it was a replica in a long line of generic family- owned shops scattered across the country. For a moment Gil had a thought-movie of a factory somewhere that made modular doughnut shops, beneath a gigantic sign

that read: **“Generic, One Size Fits All.**

Family Owned Doughnut Shops for

the Americas.” This flash was

accompanied by snatches of sales and

marketing types milling about in loud,

shiny suits, gibbering inane

bumperstickerisms while strange

machinery made cartoon-like sounds

of boinging and bonking as it

chugged out the pre-fab shop pieces.

He shook his head again in an attempt

to clear it up and a single word

spontaneously formed in the fore of his

mind: JUMP. Immediately after the

word formed his subconscious found a link and dredged up the Pointer Sisters' song, "Jump", and began playing the chorus in his head in a constant loop. For a moment, he disassociated from the theater of his head and heard his central ego voice say: "I wonder why I didn't associate something else, like Van Halen's 'Jump', instead?" Shaking his head at such a silly thought, he again attempted to focus his being and escape this oceanic free associative mode he seemed to be awash in. He

swiveled sideways in a bright orange, molded plastic chair that was attached by a pole to the bottom of the table, which in turn was anchored to the brown tile floor. The floor was specked with small bits of paper from straw covers and flecks of pastry. He took a slow, even breath. An Ink Spots song emerged from a tinny speaker overhead with a low crackle.

His vision was blurry and he narrowed his eyelids in an attempt to take stock of what was right here and right now. Lying in front of him on the grungy table he

recognized a dog-eared copy of a book that he had picked up two weeks before at a hostel on State Street in Santa Barbara. He vaguely remembered the act of reading some of it, but could not remember what the book was about. A bookmark made from a folded Del Taco napkin marking a place halfway through the thick tome told him that he probably should remember. He tried to focus on the title but couldn't make his mucus-coated eyes behave. He saw a gray and semi-transparent bacteria strand do a lazy

swim across his right eyeball.

“El Centro,” the voice piped in again.

He saw some weird graffiti carved into the table beneath the book, the bumpy scratched edges protruding from beneath either side. He didn’t bother to move the book to read the graffiti. He was too weary, too full of ennui to muster up the energy to perform even so simple a task.

“El Centro. That’s what the truck driver who dropped me off here said this place was called,” he suddenly remembered.

It began to come back to him in
snatches. Climbing out of an eighteen
wheeler at a highway off-ramp. The
walk from the off-ramp to the
doughnut shop, the yellow sign atop a
tall pole acting as a beacon that he
followed, shuffling, in a daze, like a
moth to a flame. Then, upon
approaching the door, narrowly
escaping a collision with two men who
were leaving the shop, post haste. He
remembered catching a whiff of sulfur
as they whirled past him. He waved it off
as some sort of synaesthesia. He

remembered nearly being run over by one of them again, a small peculiar looking little man, who had suddenly rushed back in to recover some forgotten leftovers. Walking, as if in a trance, Gil had shuffled to a table and dropped himself into one of the swivel seats, falling like a bag of hammers. He attempted to regain some equilibrium and focus. He had been sitting there...how long? Minutes? Hours? Days? He doubted that it was hours or days by the looks of the counter girl, an attractive but resolute

looking young woman of undetermined Asian descent, possibly with a dash of Mexican thrown in. He was fairly certain that he would have received the bum's rush if he had been sitting there more than a few minutes. He suddenly noticed that he reeked slightly of stale body odor.

He didn't have a map so he was uncertain of his exact location, other than he was somewhere in California. He only knew that because he vaguely remembered having heard of El Centro in some other time or place. He wasn't even certain of why he had been dropped off here. Had he requested it? From the looks of the terrain through the gray smudged windows, he was somewhere in the desert, so it was almost certainly southern California. Possibly near the

Mexican border.

“El Centro” he heard the female HAL like voice in his head repeat and his mind pulled up two more relative links from his subconscious. “The Middle Pillar” and “The Middle of No Where” floated up to the surface and bobbed there for a moment in his conscious mind, like a fish flashing to the surface of a pond. Turning and diving back down, both thoughts were gone as abruptly as they had arrived.

“El Centro” the HALette voice said again, like the automated

announcement voice on a commuter train as it reaches a stop.

“Maybe if I get some food in me, my blood sugar levels will stabilize, and I’ll be able to think straight,” he mused internally.

No sooner had this thought crossed his mind than the counter girl barked at him in a shrill, half-accented voice, “You gonna order some doughnuts or are you just gonna sit there?”

“What happens if I say, just sit here,” he croaked not bothering to look at her.

“I have to throw you out,” she said

matter of factly. Then, softening a bit, she asked with a semi-concerned voice, “You okay?”

“Okay?” he asked, wondering if she were more concerned with his wellbeing or the fact that he might keel over on her shift and cause her undue headaches. “Yeah, I’m okay. Can I have a...something with some substance? Something that will stick to my ribs?”

“You want a ham and cheese croissant?” she asked, going back to her official drone voice.

“Yeah, ham and cheese...coffee,” he said, his voice getting more clear with every effort to speak.

“It’s a special price if you get ham and cheese and coffee together,” she chirped with a voice that approached something akin to gaiety.

“What’s it called?” he asked, surprising himself at his level of interest in this banal conversation and in its grounding effect. It was helping him reel into focus. Plugging him into mundane reality again.

“It’s a breakfast special,” she

continued, while placing a white paper mat on a bright red plastic tray straight from the modular family shop factory.

“It’s called a Jump. Like a jump start or a jump outta bed!”

He started at the word being spoken so close to having heard it in his inner narrative. The synchronicity factor was still fairly thick and that

creepy paranoid feeling that comes with it began its creepy crawl around the edges of his consciousness.

“Jump,” he repeated flatly. “Yeah.

Gimme a Jump.”

He pulled a crumpled twenty dollar bill from the right front pocket of his jeans and carefully smoothed it out on the counter.

As he stood, obediently waiting for his JUMP special he thought back to a conversation that he had with his therapist, Dr. Seager.

They were in Doctor Seager's office in New York, in the Upper East Side. The office was decorated with a heavy Victorian-era flavor, as if the interior decorator had been Richard Burton himself. The "Great White Hunter" effect was completed by a gazelle head and antique blunderbusses hanging on the dark mahogany walls. African charms, masks and other Voodoo trinkets were scattered about, almost laissez faire in their placement. A mighty oak bookcase lined the length of the longest wall and it was filled with

handsome leather bound editions of rare books in many languages, most having to do with metaphysics or esoteric religious subjects. Opposite this bookcase was a picture window with a decent view of the city. A leather couch, which creaked in mournful protest whenever a patient wiggled, sat lengthwise against the window. At the head of the couch sat a red brocaded armchair with a matching ottoman. It is here that Doctor Seager sat as he listened to his patients and took occasional notes. He had placed it

in such a way that he could look out the window at the sky as he listened to the tales that came pouring from the inhabitants of the couch. The room swam in the comforting aromas of leather and wood polish intermingled. It was in this same chair that Dr. Seager sat on this particular day in Gil's memory and listened to his story of "the voice."

"When did you first begin to hear the voice?" Doctor Seager asked, while twirling a pencil around in his fingers, like a heavy-metal drummer doing the

flourish between beats.

“It all came to me one day in the library,” Gil said from the couch. He moved slightly and the leather made a creaking sound, like a saddle. “It whispered in my ear. No, that’s not right. Not exactly in my ear but in my ear drum, but like from behind it. It kinda tickled. Do you get what I’m saying?”

“Hmmm. Um-hmmm,” was Doctor Seager’s reply. He looked out the window at some distant point in the cloudless sky. “Go on,” he said as if to

the space at large.

“The tone was...warm in the sound-tech sense of the word. Um, mechanical, but warm. Rich is what I’m trying to say I guess. It had a melodic, tonal quality, like it had a slight, ever so slight, stereo chorus effect on it,” Gil continued somewhat uncertain.

“I didn’t know that you were into sound engineering,” Doctor Seager said, sounding only slightly surprised.

“I’m not,” Gil replied. “but I’ve been around a lot of studios when I was hanging out with bands and even in a few...” He paused for a moment.

“Anyway,” the voice said, “have you ever looked back in history and noticed that every movement of rebellion in recorded history seems to have been co-opted by the vested interests of power relatively soon after

their inception? Ever wonder why?

Hopefully you're not alone." I kinda jerked my head 'cause it tickled my inner ear and then I had this feeling that the phrase had all these other meanings attached to it, like it carried multiple layers of information on top, that said so much more than the simple words could, like an echo. Is any of this making sense?" he asked the Doctor in a pleading tone.

"Yes, the ancient Hebrews, the Babylonians, Sumerians, others, many cultures have ascribed multi-

dimensionality to words and their meanings. Even down to letters in some cases, but we won't go into all of that now. Is there more to this story?" he asked, tapping his pipe into an expensive- looking ashtray that had an ornate knob in the center of it.

"Well, then the words 'relative database' came to mind and I thought about it. What I had just experienced with the...multidimensionality...of the words, is that what you called it?" he looked to Doctor Seager for confirmation and received it in the

form of a nod so he went on.

“Relative databases, which I knew from working with Dr. Abrams, how data sets linked to other data sets, ad infinitum.”

He paused again as he tried to reel his mind back in from the enormous complexity of it all. Taking a breath he started again, “Indra’s net. I read about that in a reference book on comparative religion in the library. In the margin, someone had scrawled a note in pen that said: *‘If you are reading this book, you probably think the following chapter is not addressed to*

you and maybe it isn't. However, you may want to ask yourself, after reading this essay, if you weren't even a little complicit in the propagation of what I call the Rebel Industry would you even be reading these words?' and I swear the hairs on the back of my neck stood up and I got a cold prickly sensation. Ok, back to the voice." He fidgeted on the couch again, clearly agitated by the retelling of this story. Doctor Seager made a note in his pad, without looking up. "Now the gears of my mind were making all kinds of connections, like a

spider web, but huge! I began to
contemplate, no a better term would be
to see, how we carry a complete
recapitulation of the planet's
memory, our own racial, genetic
and species-oriented memories, maybe
what Jung was getting at with the
collective unconscious, but bigger..."
He trailed off, lost in the enormity

of the concepts again. He noticed that his T-shirt was beginning to stick damply to his shoulder blades.

“Yes,” Doctor Seager said firmly, “so this turned into a kind of epiphany.” He said it as a statement of fact rather than posing it as a question.

“Yeah, but then I heard the voice again,” Gil replied, “only this time it was cold and metallic, not warm and melodic and it said: ‘There seems to be an observable pattern of movements of rebellion against consensus reality

followed by a co-option of those movements by established cultural institutions. Can this pattern be broken or should it?" Gil sighed.

"And then it was gone for a while."

"Has it been back since?" Doctor Seager asked, raising his eyebrows and staring straight at Gil.

"Yes," Gil replied. "The voice often comes in and reads off a list of names. Like: John Dillinger, James Dean, Marlon Brando, Henry Miller, Jack Kerouac, William S. Burroughs, D.B. Cooper, Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin,

Robert Anton Wilson, punk rock, hip-hop, Hakim Bey, grunge, Colton Harris-Moore, Bikers. Harley Davidson, The Rockstar, The Hacker. Other times it recites lists of movies or books like: *The Ego and His Own*; *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*; *Rebel Without a Cause*; *The Wild One*; *Wild in the Streets*; *Easy Rider*; *A Clockwork Orange*; *Taxi Driver*; *Fight Club*; *The Matrix*; *American Beauty*...and it always ends by saying: 'We have to stop looking to Hollywood, the music industry,

Madison Avenue, Wall Street and even the publishing industry for our concept of rebels.’”

Doctor Seager sat still for a moment.

“Do the words Culture Jammer mean anything to you, Gil?” he finally asked after a pregnant pause. “No.”

“Have you ever read the life story or any accounts of the life of John Nash?” Doctor Seager queried.

“No,” Gil answered again.

“Well, you should look into those things Gil. In the case of Nash, skip the movie and actually read *A Beautiful*

Mind. He had a glimpse through the media curtain, saw through the weave, if only faintly. Unfortunately, he let himself be convinced that he was going insane. I have a suspicion that a part of you is talking to you from outside the wall of artificiality, maybe a future self, and a part of your psyche that dwells outside this construct that many call 'reality'. Did you know that several prominent mathematicians have very robust theories that seem to indicate that we do in fact dwell inside a simulation of some sort?"

“You mean, like the Matrix?” Gil asked.

“Um, yes, sort of like that, but without the cheesy Maya effects and crappy sequels,” the doctor responded dryly.

“I don’t understand,” Gil half spoke, half croaked.

“Let me read a few things from the dictionary,” the doctor said, picking up a dictionary from the desk.

“Co-option: To take or assume for one’s own use. Appropriate: To neutralize or win over (an independent minority, for example) through assimilation into an established group or culture.

“Rebel: One who rebels or is in rebellion. Rebellion: To refuse

allegiance to and oppose by force an established government or ruling authority. To resist or defy an authority or a generally accepted convention.”

He closed the dictionary and fell silent, looking at Gil, who was on the couch, with his forearm draped over his eyes. The Doctor then reached into a drawer of his desk and pulled down a worn and dog-eared spiral notebook that looked to be several years old. He opened it in the middle and thumbed a few pages until he found what he was looking for.

He proceeded to read from the faded and smeared blue-lined pages.

“The answer is simple. What we see in films like *American Beauty* and *Fight Club* is not actually a critique of consumerism; it’s merely a restatement of the ‘critique of mass society’ that has been around since the 1950s. The two are not the same. In fact, the critique of mass society has been one of the most powerful forces driving consumerism for more than 40 years.

“What *Fight Club* and films like *Rabbit, Run* present, in a user-friendly fashion,

is the critique of mass society, which was developed in the late 1950s in classic works like William Whyte's *The Organization Man* (1956), Vance Packard's *The Status Seekers* (1959) and Paul Goodman's *Growing Up Absurd* (1960). The central idea is quite simple: capitalism requires conformity to function correctly. As a result, the system is based upon a generalized system of repression. Individuals who resist the pressure to conform therefore subvert the system, and aid in its overthrow.

“This sort of ‘anti-advertising’ was enormously successful in the 1960s, transforming the VW bug from a Nazi car into the symbol of the hippie counterculture and making the Volvo the car of choice for an entire generation of leftist academics. Similar advertising strategies are just as successful today, and are used to sell everything from breakfast cereal to clothing. Thus, the kind of ad parodies that we find in Adbusters, far from being subversive, are indistinguishable from many genuine ad

campaigns. Flipping through the magazine, one cannot avoid thinking back to Frank's observation that 'business is amassing great sums by charging admission to the ritual simulation of its own lynching.'"

He stopped reading and closed the notebook and continued to stare thoughtfully at the wrinkled cover.

“Doc, you’re being weird with all this speech-making, even if you are reading it. Are you trying to indoctrinate me into something? Are you anti-capitalist?” Gil asked taking his forearm off his eyes for the first time since the doctor had begun reading.

“No, not in the least, Gil,” the Doctor replied. “I simply wrote those words down several years ago, because when

I read them and I admit, I forget where I copied them from, I was making a note to remind myself that rebellion and the 'spectacle' as the Situationist International would have called it, cannot go hand-in-hand without the latter absorbing the former." He took a slow, deep breath and continued.

"Where else can you see a megastar like Brad Pitt railing against

khakis and duvets and all sorts of commercial crap all the time pulling down a seven-figure salary while doing

it? I mean, some lines from the movie and the book make brilliant stand-alone statements against the homogenized vacuum of consensus culture.” He moves forward in his chair and adjusts the sleeves of his tweed jacket.

“The fact that we’re sitting here talking about this through the medium of a Hollywood movie only highlights how much the media trance affects all of us.” He turns to look straight at you the reader as if through a camera lens.

“Yes, even you, reading this, who think you’re above it all.” He quickly looks

away, coughs, adjusts his tie and recedes back behind the fourth wall.

After a pregnant pause, he began again. “People like Stewart Home, in his book *The Mind Invaders* makes some salient points about this type of phenomena...” he started to say.

“Is all of the media on the take or something?” Gil interrupted. “I mean, yes, people like Brad Stone and Oprah are on the payroll, in the pockets of corporate interests obviously, but *everyone*? I mean, c’mon. Next you’re going to start talking about controlled

demolition and remote controlled

airplanes and shape shifting

reptilians..." He trailed off. "You're

not, are you?" he croaked dryly.

"No, I'm not," the doctor said briskly.

"Look, Gil, you need to take

some notes on what we are talking

about here, and go do some research

before we go any further. Also I'm

going to give you a book and I want

you to read it. Then come back here

and we'll talk about this some more."

"A book?" Gil asked puzzled.

"Yes. Julian Jaynes, *The Origin of*

Consciousness in the Breakdown of the

Bicameral Mind. Read it and then

come back next week and we'll talk

about this some more. I think this book

can give some basis of understanding

for what may be happening to you,"

Doctor Seager said

solemnly, reaching for a white-covered book on the desk behind his chair.

“What a coincidence that he already had it on his desk,” Gil thought as he took the book from the therapist.

“You need to get your head around these voice phenomena, or you could end up having a major break and spiral in dereliction,” said the doctor, with a tone of concern.

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“I said, here’s your Jump!” The counter

girl was almost yelling.

“Huh?” Gil’s head jerked up from his reverie. “Sorry. I spaced out. I guess I’m stupid from hunger.”

The twenty-dollar bill was still lying on the counter where he had smoothed it out a few minutes before.

The counter girl looked down at the twenty and then back at Gil’s haggard face.

“Tell ya what,” she said in a firm voice, “this one’s on me.”

“Thanks!” he said with genuine elements of surprise and gratitude in his voice.

He reached down and picked up the twenty, crumpled it in his fist and wadded it back into his front pocket.

“Coke adds life!” he suddenly said cheerily, as he laughed wryly, picked up his tray and smiled a peculiar smile.

Joseph Matheny is a writer, filmmaker and technologist that has played a role in establishing and evangelizing

standards and practices such as CD
ROM, PDF, DVD, XML, RSS,
Podcasting, ARG and digital video. He
holds patents for prediction,
recommendation and behavioral
analysis algorithms and software
design. He is a published author of
screenplays, white papers,
technology, sci-fi, marketing and
gaming books. He currently resides in
Los Angeles, CA.